ZANE BOYD

A SELECTION OF EMAIL CORRESPONDENCE, LETTERS & PUBLISHED ARTICLES

As presented to the Memorial gathering honouring his life, in Toronto, November 24, 2013

PART 2 – Political notes: 1987 – 2011

1987-November:	(with Ross Dowson): An appeal calling upon the Soviet government to rehabilitate all the victims of the Moscow Trials 1936-1938 – "Clear the names of the accused" – Canadian & international signatories
2000-Nov. 28	Email: Forward Group meeting and Rebuilding the Left
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2003-May16	Email to Gord, JD and Harry, re: S.A. (USA) caves in on Cuban socialist democracy
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2003-June 13	Email re: Reply to James Petras on intellectuals and Cuba

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Note:
Previous articles by Zane Boyd appeared in **Young Socialist***,*
Toronto, available at National Archives, Ottawa:

1970, ***Young Socialist*** Vol. 1 No. 1: "Trotsky: Rebel to revolutionary"

1971, ***Young Socialist*** Vol. 2 No. 1: "Turmoil in Eastern Europe"

November 1987: Press Release from the Forward Group authored by Ross Dowson and Zane Boyd:

An appeal calling upon the Soviet government to rehabilitate immediately all victims of the Moscow Trials of 1936-38

Statement to the press released to all the services located in Ottawa, November 5, 1987

An appeal calling upon the Soviet government to rehabilitate immediately all victims of the Moscow Trials of 1936-38 was submitted to Soviet Ambassador Alexey Rodionov to Canada today at the embassy's reception celebrating the 70th anniversary of the 1917 October Revolution.

The international appeal, which is drawing growing support across the globe, was submitted on behalf of the 33 noteworthy Canadians who have added their names to the appeal to date. Among the Canadian signatories are Michael Cassidy, M.P. and former leader of the Ontario NDP; Cy Gonick, economist and editor, *Canadian Dimension*; G.S.Kealey, editor, *Labour/Travail*; Dimitri Roussopoulos, editor *Our Generation*; Rick Salutin, playright, journalist, and an editor of *This Magazine*; two eminent lawyers, Harry Kopyto and Clayton Ruby, and the well-known feminists Varda Burstyn and Judy Rebick.

According to Ross Dowson and Zane Boyd, who presented the appeal to the ambassador to be forwarded to Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev, "The signers of the appeal welcome the new period of 'glasnost' which the Soviet government under Mikhail Gorbachev has initiated. Surely, however, for there to be glasnost in the present and in future, there must be glasnost toward the past," they said.

Elaborating on the significance of this appeal, Dowson and Boyd pointed out: "This matter does not concern the Soviet people alone. The international socialist movement -- in fact, the very name and cause of socialism itself -- suffered enormously and still suffers the dire effects of the events of the 1930s in the USSR.

"The 70th anniversary of the Revolution is certainly a most fitting occasion for the Soviet government to undertake the rehabilitation of all victims of the trials. The accused all played leading roles in the revolution and/or were prominent figures in the early years of the Soviet government.

"It is high time to speak the truth about the past -- fully, honestly, openly. The very future of socialism in the USSR and, indeed, throughout the world is at stake."

(Handwritten note by Ross Dowson on Archives copy: "Vern and Anne: Here is a poor retyping of our press release – a good and valuable experience. Thanks for your support. I am returning your cheque which was for the ad. Total expenses with 2 returned bus fares, xeroxing, stamps etc. around $350.00 I think we can cover it OK – Cassidy and Heap were at reception. Our good ***reverend*** *apologized for not signing the appeal – pile up work. No Kashtan (Canadian CP leader*

–ed.) types appeared but probably they were in the kitchen. Ross
Dear Ross: Thanks for your note. Here is $100 to help defray the above expenses. Vern

This appeal was submitted to the Soviet ambassador at a Nov.5 reception to be forwarded to Soviet leader Gorbachov

CLEAR THE NAMES OF THE ACCUSED IN THE MOSCOW TRIALS

IT IS now over fifty years since the infamous Moscow Show Trials. It is astounding that at a time when the Soviet government is at pains to emphasize its concern with 'human rights' and proclaims the need for 'glasnost' — 'openness' — the accused in these trials, with a few exceptions, are still considered guilty of being paid agents of Nazism, and other crimes.

Among these men were numbered several who played outstanding roles in the Russian Revolution of 1917. The reputations of founders of the Soviet state like Zinoviev, Radek, Trotsky and Bukharin were besmirched or expunged from the history books. Today, no one doubts that the 'confessions' at the trials — the sole basis for the prosecution — were utterly false. Seven defendants in the third trial, Krestinsky and others, have been both judicially rehabilitated and politically exonerated. So have the military leaders, Tukhachevsky and others, whose military trial in 1937 was held in secret. But the admittedly false evidence against these men was inseparable from the charges against all the other accused.

None of the accused, of course, is alive today. Many were executed immediately after their trials. Others died in prison or camps. Leon Trotsky, the chief accused in all three of the trials, was murdered in exile in 1940. However, families of some of the defendants are still living in the Soviet Union. Some had also suffered imprisonment and exile. It is worth recalling that a review of all these cases was promised by Khrushchev, but this promise was broken. We the undersigned therefore call on the Soviet government to re-examine the cases against all these victims of the perversion of Soviet justice, as took place with Krestinsky. We are confident that all those accused in the Trials of 1936-1938 will be shown to have been innocent. They should immediately be rehabilitated, their honour restored, their families compensated and their graves marked.

CANADIAN SIGNATORIES TO DATE:
Carl Birchard, Hans Blumenfeld, John Boyd, Ruth Bullock, Varda Burstyn, Michael Cassidy, MP, Gordon Doctorow, Ross Dowson, Marv Gandall, Cy Gonick, Gerry Hunnius, G.S. Kealey, Harry Kopyto, George Martell, David McNally, Joe Meslin Verne1 Olson, Leo Panitch, Norman Penner, Jim Pringle, Judy Rebick, Satu Repo, Wayne Roberts, Lukin Robinson, Dimitri Roussopoulos, Clayton Ruby, Rick Salutin, Chris Schenk, William Spira, Donald Swartz, Jerry Szach, Jesse Vorst, Reg Whitaker.

FROM A GROWING LIST OF INTERNATIONAL SIGNATORIES:
Tariq Ai/Britain/Pakistan, Perry Anderson/Britain, Sidney Bidwell, MP/Britain, Wolf Bierman/E. Germany, Robin Blackburn/Britain, Hugo Blanco/Peru, Peter Brandt/W. Germany, Fenner Brockway/Britain, Efraim Calvo, MP/Bexico, Vlady Chibalchich/USSR/Mexico, Noam Chomsky/USA, Terry Davis, MP/Britain, Tamara Deutscher/Britain, Jose-Luis Diaz-Moll,

MP/Mexico, Djiudjic/Yugoslavia, Ernst Federn/Austria, Peter Fryer/Britain, Dan Gallin/USA, Adolfo Gilly/Mexico, Mildred Gordon, MP/Britain, Reg Groves/Britain, Virgiliao Guimaraes, HP/Brazil, G. Gursoy /Turkey. Jiri Hayek/Czechoslovakia, Eric Heffer, MP/Britain, Rosario Ibarra, MP/Mexico, Petra Kelly, MP/W. Germany, Tom Kemp/Britain, Leo Kofler/W. Germany, Lev Kopelev, USSR, Alain Rrivine/France, Joanne Landy/DSA, Ren Livingstone/Britain Peter Lonkhorst, MP/Holland, Michael Lowy/France/Brazil, Eddie Loyden, MP/Britain, Oliver MacDonald/Britain, Harry Magdoff/USA, Livio Maitan/Italy, Ernest Mandel/Belgium, Seguro Melendez/Venezuela, Ian Mikardo, MP Britain, Marguerito Montes/Mexico, Hugo Moscoso/Bolivia, Stan Newens, MEP/Britain, Ricardo Pascoe, MP/Mexico, Brian Pearce/Britain, Pedro Penalosa, MP/Mexico, Rosalia Peredo, MP/Mexico, Gert Petersen, MP/Denmark, Raul Pont, MP/Brazil, Michel Raptis/Greece, Frank Ridley/Britain, J. Sabata/Czechoslovakia, Erik Solheim/Korvay, Lotfallah Soliman/Egypt, S. Stojanovic/Yugoslavia, Paul Sweezy/USA, Bala Tampoe/Sri Lanka, Peter Obi/Czechoslovakia, J. Ulburghs, MP, MEP/Belgium, Frank Vandenbroecke, MP/Belgium, Andree Van Es, MP/Holland. Charlie van Gelderen/Britain, Marijke Van Hemeldonck, MP MEP/Belgium, Francois Vercammen/Belgium, Michael Warahawski/Israel, Harry Wicks/Britain, David Winnick, MP/Britain, Jacques Yerna/Belgium, Hocine Zouane/Algeria.

For further information, contact Ross Dowson, 40 Homewood Avenue, #1809, Toronto M4Y 2K2 (416)-961-4554

EMAIL From: Zane Boyd
Sir Sandford Fleming College
Date: Tuesday, November 28, 2000
Subject: Forward Group meeting and Rebuilding the Left issue

Dear Comrades,

As I indicated at the last branch, I won't be in town this week for tomorrow's meeting. Also, I don't expect to be back in TO till the week of the 18th. You might want to consider this when setting the next meeting date, although I know you may feel that the 20th (as opposed to the 13th) is too late and already too far along into the holiday.

I also wanted to let you know that I believe the Rebuilding the Left crew *(an initially promising but short-lived caucus of Southern Ontario unionist activists –ed.)* is holding another colloquium this coming Sunday, December 3rd. Only, I don't know where. When I was in town earlier this month. Ken Theobald at DEC mentioned the meeting, but he said they didn't have a location booked yet. Assuming it's still on, I'm sure you can find out where and when it's happening by phoning DEC. It might also be listed in this week's NOW (magazine), I don't know. Anyway, I think that one or two of you should try to get there.

I'm not going to comment further at this time on the Rebuilding the Left issue which I'm sure you'll be discussing again at this week's meeting. However, I'm looking forward to getting a synopsis of the discussion in the minutes. I feel that to give proper consideration to my own views on the matter, I need to write up a more involved, contextually and historically situated appreciation of the issue, rather than simply some more of my necessarily cursory and, unfortunately, curt emails.

Anyway, there's no big hurry here. In fact, the Rebuilding the Left phenomenon — together with the continued stalemate of the NDP as evidenced by yesterday's election — can be the stimulus for a much-needed broader assessment and discussion of the overall political conjuncture we find ourselves in and of our own prospects and purpose as a revolutionary Marxist group.

When the Trotskyist movement was larger and more intact, we used to have this kind of involved analysis and discussion regularly when we had conventions based around Political Reports and Tasks and Perspectives Reports. We also had our press. One of the effects of our own attrition — given our individual lack of time and lacking the benefit of an organization and press afford — we seem to have gotten used to proffering rather hasty, fly-by-night commentary on events as they unfold, rather than the more considered analysis and discussion that really only a written discussion can afford.

1 don't know if, time-wise, we can managed such a discussion. But, if it is possible, I think it would be good for all of us individually in terms of getting each of us to articulate our views in a more considered and succinct manner. I also think it would be good for our collective cohesiveness, clarity and sense of purpose. In fact, although I may not have agreed with the thrust of your analysis and argument, John, what impressed me was that you took the time to write out and circulated your analysis. By comparison, my own response was rather feeble and undeveloped. Nevertheless, I must say that the discussion that's ensued among us over this Rebuilding the Left issue has begun to remind me of the kind of debates we used to have in the movement at one time. And I want to point out that it was through those sometimes heated debates that I was challenged to develop and articulate my political views and through which I became a more astute and critical thinker.

Yours, Zane

PS: Although I'm still using this "fleming" email address for now, it won't be extant after Christmas since I won't be registering for the second semester. I can't access it from off-campus anyway. So, I'm asking everyone to start switching to emailing me at my hotmail address, i.e., mailto:zaneboyd@hotmail.com.

Tuesday, January 28, 2003
Subject: Jack Layton interview

Dear Michael Enright and the CBC Sunday Edition,

Like I'm sure most of your audience, I listened eagerly to your discussion with Jack Layton last week after his stunning victory at the NDP Convention. I was perhaps more eager than most, seeing as I've not only voted for the NDP but also been an active member for most of my life. I say "most of my life", because over the past decade I've allowed my membership to lapse at times and have not remained active in the Party.

In discussing the reasons for the NDP's decline since the late 80s when it held 43 seats under Ed Broadbent, both you and Jack Layton, I think, missed one very significant factor, a factor that was of the Party's very own making.

It was in fact largely because of the NDP's very electoral successes under Ed Broadbent, and then Bob Rae's unexpected victory in Ontario, that the Party establishment deliberately set out to transform the NDP from the movement of social activists it had always been into a purely electoral machine. As the Party leadership basked in the heady promise of electoral success and influence, it curtailed debate within representative bodies of the Party. The Party ridings, which had always been the lifeblood of the NDP, were relegated to irrelevance becoming mainly electoral nomination bodies and cheering sections. Scores of social and community activists left the Party or became inactive, the Party failed to attract new blood, and the NDP was widely perceived within the broader community, especially among the new generation of youth, as just another elitist political party that asks for your vote every four years.

The NDP, even with Layton's fresh face, will never amount to anything different if it aims simply to get elected—mainly by out-liberaling the Liberals. It will only succeed by becoming again a party of labour and social activists that aims to build a broad popular social movement in this country that can challenge the corporate domination of the Canadian economy, government and media — not only at election time, but day-by-day at the local, community level.

Jack Layton's clear victory represents, in part, a broad desire to return the Party to its activist grassroots. But if, as Jack Layton himself stated in your interview, the Party is to truly be both a parliamentary party AND a social movement, men the NDP under Layton will have to reform the Parry itself, by opening itself up wide to the new generation of social activists, to ongoing discussion and debate, and by revitalizing the Party ridings as bodies of ongoing political and social activism.

Otherwise, the NDP may succeed in gaining back some seats, but will continue to be perceived mainly as just another bunch of parliamentarians — well-meaning perhaps, but inevitably less influential than the Liberals.

And Jack Layton will have been just another pretty political face.

Sincerely yours,

ZaneBoyd

Box 603, Mountainview Apts. RR2, Haliburton ON
PS: I enjoy your show every Sunday I can manage to get to listen to it. (It's kinda like my Church!) Cheers!

February 10, 2003
To: "Claire Dineen
Subject: Re: The Ostrich Principal - With head in sand, we see no evil!)

Dear Claire et al.,
Thanks for forwarding this. Actually, I read the article in last Sunday's Toronto Star. And I sent the following letter in response – which, however, the Star chose not to publish. Perhaps that's because I recently had another letter that they prominently featured. Or, I suspect more likely, Winston Churchill is something of a sacred cow with the Star and the media in general and they don't brook any criticism of his purported role as an intransigent foe of Hitler.

Anyway, judge for yourself. My main point is that Guernica was NOT simply some sort of pacifist statement against war in general by Picasso. Communist that he was, he was also protesting that the major powers did not intervene to assist the Republican forces against the fascist counterrevolution in Spain, as the Communist and Socialist parties in Europe were then demanding. It was left to civilian volunteers, including the Mackenzie-Papineau Brigade from Canada, to provide what proved to be hopelessly inadequate assistance.

Ciao for now, Zane...

Letters to the Editor *The Toronto Star*, February 9
Dear Editor,

Re The Lessons of Guernica

Columnist William Walker observes: "Still, those who support Bush argue that, if world leaders had stepped in and dealt with Hitler after he intervened in Spain's civil war, there might not have been a World War II."

"After" Hitler intervened? Why didn't world leaders step in during the civil war?

The truth is, Churchill, Roosevelt et al. happily sat on their hands while Franco, Hitler and Mussolini overthrew the popular Spanish Republican government. The last thing they wanted — even more than any threat from Hitler—was a popular socialist government in western Europe. And so, they gave tacit approval to Franco, Hitler and Mussolini's actions in Spain. These "world leaders" were all appeasers of Fascism while it was in their own political self-interest.

Picasso was himself well aware of this complicity on the part of the capitalist democracies. His painting was not only a protest against the bombing, but against those who stood idly by.

Am I saying that England and the U.S. should have sent troops to Spain? By no means. Had they done so, they would only have imposed their own will on the Spanish people. And they would not have been welcomed, in any case. However, they could easily have provided desperately needed arms and humanitarian assistance to Spain's Republican forces.

Comparing Iraq today with 1930s Spain and Germany is naive, while comparing Saddam Hussein with Hitler is downright absurd. Hitler headed a massive popular fascist movement that was supported by millions both in Germany and throughout Europe. He had made clear his expansionist intentions and acted on them by attacking the rest of Europe, cast and west.

Saddam has neither the intention, the support nor the means to launch a war of conquest against his neighbours, let alone Europe and the United States. He and his regime are in fact quite insular. As for the biological and other weapons of mass destruction he may possess, he is certainly more likely to use them if he is attacked. What's more, such an attack would inflame the entire Middle East, win new recruits to fundamentalist and terrorist organizations, strengthen the hand of dictatorships and the military throughout the region, quite possibly lead to a wider regional war, and — if biological or nuclear weapons are used — could ultimately threaten the entire world.

Yours sincerely,
Zane Boyd

Zane Boyd, 10:52 PM, March 10, 2003
Dear John,

I just finished reading your missive on the Cuba debate.

Basically, I think it is excellent I don't think you really need to alter it that much Personally, I regard this kind of off-the-cuff contribution a rather refreshing alternative to the more measured tone of, say, my own reply to Petras for instance. You do have problems in making yourself quite clear in a couple of paragraphs; other than that, I think it's fine.

One thing I want to raise, however—! may have already raised it in an earlier email — is my own more critical re-evaluation of the Cuban revolution.

We Trotskyists supported the socialist direction the Revolution took, as it demonstrated the validity of the theory of permanent revolution as the only road for the anti-colonial revolution But the revolution was led by a guerrilla movement — actually more than one guerrilla movement, of which the July 26th movement turned out to be the most influential.

There is a fundamental difference between the Russian Revolution and the Cuban. The Russian Revolution was a spontaneous revolt of the masses, mainly in response to the World War. The Soviets were spontaneous organizations of the workers, peasants and soldiers, which eventually led to a dual power situation vis-à-vis the bourgeois reformist government As we know, the Bolsheviks were actually originally caught off-guard with this situation Hence, Lenin's “April Theses.”

This was not the case in Cuba however. The Cuban masses did not organize themselves in self-management organizations. The Revolution was essentially conducted "in the name of the Cuban

populace by a self-styled leadership. And it is my contention at this point that this "self-appointed" role by the July 26th movement shaped the early regime's nature, including its undemocratic character.

I think we Trotskyists, in fact, tended to turn a blind eye to what was going on, I think because we were wedded to our theoretical predilections, i.e., the permanent revolution, which we tended to place ahead of our democratic scruples. (As the New Age saying goes, "Our dogma got in the way our karma!")

The eventual undemocratic nature of the Soviet regime, on the other hand, was shaped by the conditions of outright civil war.

...Anyway, my hour on the computer at the library is up now, so I have to go. These however are my basic and initial thoughts for the moment.

Yours for the revolution — and karma! (Actually, isn't revolution the ultimate karma?!)
Zane

Date: Mon, 12 May 2003
Subject: Re: **Critical review of James Petras's views on Cuba**

Dear Gord,

1. 1 did get the other email with Fred Feldman's reply to John. Thanks.

2. 1 did send the Galleano article to JD, Harry and Joe, but not to John Glenn or to anyone else. For now, I'd like YOU to go ahead and send out Galeano's statement to the broader network of politicos. I may write up a reply to the Petras piece myself, in which case I'd send it out in my own name and, ergo, de facto, once again be hooked into the broader email loop. By the way, did you notice Petras's scandalous attack on the former Soviet and East European dissidents, including Solidarnosc — specifically his allegation that they were/are responsible for the current mess the region is in (mafia, economic losses, unemployment and poverty, etc.)? No mention of the bureaucracy's corruption, waste and ineptitude; nor, for that matter, of the US and NATO's bankrupting the Soviet economy via the arms race. And Petras waxes indignant about the importance of context! Hah!

3. 1 will be able to make it back to the Jack and Jill party on the 31st. I'll forward you the $15. Further on this, is it okay if Ingrid comes, too, now that we're seeing each other again. Please let me know either way.

4. 1 expect to head back to Haliburton probably Thursday.
Meanwhile, I continue to stay at Ingrid''s
(end of copied email –ed.)

Date: Fri, 16 May 2003
Subject: Re: **FW: S.A.(USA) caves in on Cuban socialist democracy**

Dear Gord—and JD and Harry,

Excellent, hard-hitting response, John. I intend to give it a more considered reading and perhaps offer some comment. But, for now, I think it's a damning indictment, offering a good historic perspective not only on the Revolution, but our support, response and attitude to it from its inception. One immediate question I have, though, John: you say over 100 dissidents sentenced...The figure I've been reading throughout is over 70. Were there some additional sentences I may have missed?

Anyway, I'd like to know each of your general opinion/comments on the (draft) critique of Petras I sent you. I've already made some minor editorial improvements. I have hesitated to send it out confidently à la John's bold response only because I thought I'd send it for possible publication in *Canadian Dimension,*and *Socialist Action (US)* (Can you suggest any other publication?) – as well as the usual email suspects on the Canadian left. I want to make sure there are no glaring errors or ill-considered notions in it. Which is why I've wanted your input, first. Maybe I needn't be so cautious and just let it confidently fly, like you have, John. After all, it's a debate we're engaged in here, right? and not like we're drafting some historical document. Anyway, let me know what you think, as soon as you're able.

As you can see, I did manage to get online today, after all, despite the library being closed. The fact is, I decided to reactivate my former account from home again — bit the internet bullet, as it were — partly because I'm enrolling in an on-line course at York for September, but also just to make things easier. I have NOT yet been able to renew my former address, which will have to *(wait until I)* straighten out with my ISP tech support. I'll let you know when I've managed to reactivate that account. Meanwhile, I'm still using my same yahoo account.
Zane

The Debate Over the Recent Arrests and Sentences in Cuba

Zane Boyd

[from *New Politics,* (New York) vol. 9, no. 3 (new series), Whole no. 35, Summer 2003]

ZANE BOYD has been a lifelong Canadian socialist. He was raised in a Communist Party family, but subsequently, after spending a year in Moscow, became a dedicated anti-Stalinist. From age 15, he participated in the movement against the

war in Vietnam. In the 1970s and early 1980s, he was actively involved in defending Soviet and East European political prisoners. He has supported and identified with the Cuban revolution since his early youth.

A REMARKABLE DEBATE HAS opened up in the international left around the arrests and harsh sentences meted out to more than 70 opponents of the Cuban government and its execution of three hijackers earlier this year. The debate is an important one, because what's at stake is not only how best to respond to the U.S.'s criminal policy toward Cuba but, more importantly, how best to defend the Cuban revolution itself.

While there have been numerous statements and counter-statements on this issue, I wish to focus on the contribution by veteran Marxist and Latin America scholar James Petras, "The Responsibility of the Intellectuals: Cuba, the U.S. and Human Rights," which he issued May 1, 2003.

While Petras acknowledges various right-wing intellectuals who have predictably condemned the Cuban government's actions, he makes it clear his primary target is "a small army of otherwise progressive intellectuals — Chomsky, Sontag, Zinn and Wallerstein." It is this "progressive" group that he says "causes the greatest harm to the burgeoning anti-imperialist movement."

Intellectual Integrity

I want to answer what I can only describe as slanders by Petras against these intellectuals. This is necessary since, after all, the very subject of Petras's piece is the responsibility of intellectuals.

Well, the first responsibility is to integrity, honesty and truth. What is particularly galling (as well as unhelpful for a healthy debate and exchange) is that, while waxing indignant over dishonesty, moral blackmail and "mendacious moralizing," Petras himself engages in a defamation of his intellectual targets.

For instance: ". . . prestigious intellectuals brandish their past credentials as 'critics' of U.S. foreign policy to give credibility to their uninformed denunciation of alleged Cuban moral transgressions, equating Cuba's arrest of paid functionaries of the U.S. State Department and the execution of three terrorist kidnappers with the genocidal war crimes of U.S. imperialism. The practitioners of moral equivalents apply a microscope to Cuba and a telescope to U.S. crimes — which gives them a certain acceptability among the liberal sectors of the empire."

What is this about "past" credentials? The international statement against the Cuban regime's crackdown signed by Chomsky, Wallerstein, Zinn and a host of other "otherwise progressive" intellectual authors contains fully four out of six paragraphs focused clearly on the past *and* the present crimes of the U.S. government. It is a demagogic smear to claim that these intellectuals make a moral equation between the recent actions of the Cuban government with the manifold crimes of U.S. imperialism.

The slander gets worse. Again: "But our moralists are not bothered by context, by U.S. threats to Cuba immediate or proximate, they are eager to ignore it all to demonstrate to the State Department that they not only oppose U.S. foreign policy but also condemn every independent country, system and leader who opposes the U.S. In other words, Mr. Ashcroft, when you crack down on the 'apologists' for Cuban 'terror', remember that we are different, we too condemned Cuba, we too called for a change of regime."

Incredible! The real reason these so-called progressive intellectuals have condemned the Cuban regime's crackdown is . . . to curry the favor of the U.S. State Department! Since when has Noam Chomsky ever curried the U.S. State Department's favor, or any other of these other individuals for that matter? It is to laugh! Or perhaps cry.

In the spirit of free debate and openness of ideas -- that which, incidentally, should also prevail in any country calling itself socialist — Petras is of course fully entitled to criticize the response of various intellectuals to the recent Cuban events. However, he has no justification for maligning or impugning the motives of those he takes issue with based on fabrication, innuendo and hyperbole. This makes it difficult to take any argument he may have seriously and effectively discourages further debate.

A Shameful Lack of Context

ON A MORE CRITICAL MATTER, for someone who lectures about the importance of context, Petras himself displays a shameful lack of it in yet another noteworthy paragraph. "Let us remember," he writes, "the same intellectuals supported 'dissidents' in Eastern Europe and Russia who were bankrolled by Soros and the U.S. State Department. The 'dissidents' turned the country over to the Russian mafia, life expectancy declined five years (over 10 million Russians died prematurely with the sacking of the national health system), while in Eastern Europe 'dissidents' closed the shipyards of Gdansk, enrolled in NATO and provided mercenaries for the U.S. conquest of Iraq. And never among these current supporters of Cuban 'dissidents' is there any critical reflection on the catastrophic outcomes resulting from their anti-communist diatribes and their manifestos in favor of the 'dissidents' who have become the soldiers of the U.S. Middle Eastern and Central European empire."

Context, indeed! So, it was Adam Michnik, Jacek Kuron and their colleagues who single-handedly restored free market capitalism in Poland. The kindly declaration of martial law by that great friend of socialism, Wojciech Jaruzelski, and his Stalinist henchmen of course had nothing to do with Poland's subsequent fate. And it was the likes of Leonid Pliushch and Ivan Dziuba who brought Ukraine to its knees and not the years of Stalinist rot brought on by those Ukrainian socialist paragons, Leonid Brezhnev and Konstantin Chernenko, and their cronies.

The "critical reflection" that Petras so rightly demands on the recent history of the former "socialist" states of the USSR and Eastern Europe is not a matter of mere idle theoretical and historical interest to socialist Cuba. It is vital, given the urgency of the Cuba's own current crisis.

Unfortunately, Petras himself turns reality on its head on this subject. It wasn't dissidents who sold off the Soviet economy and took over along with the Russian mafia. Rather, it was those with the power to do so — former state apparatchiks themselves, especially those within the managerial bureaucracy.

This was also largely the case on the political level. Boris Yeltsin and now Vladimir Putin were former Communist Party stalwarts, as was Byelorus's Alexander Lukachenko. In Eastern Europe, meanwhile, ex-Communist bosses morphed into "social democrats" or adopted some other new guise, and have moved in and out of political power over the past decade. It's hard to believe that Petras doesn't know all this already. Or, has the vehemence of his vitriol against his intellectual nemeses simply clouded his memory?

In any event, does Petras actually believe that none of this would have happened — that there would have been no collapse of the Soviet and East European systems, no restoration of capitalism — had the "dissidents" simply kept their mouths shut or perhaps been eliminated? Petras should instead be asking himself how it is that these former "socialist" governments collapsed with such overwhelming popular approval with nary a peep of protest or ounce of resistance from any of the working classes of these countries.

What we have here is conspiracy theory substituting for serious social analysis. There is nothing regarding the corruption, decadence and oppression of Stalinist rule. There is nothing on the role (or passive lack thereof) played by the Soviet and East European working class. There is nothing about the absence of socialist democracy. There is nothing even regarding the U.S. and NATO's bankrupting the Soviet economy through the four-decades-long arms and space race.

No, the entire socio-economic evolution of these countries over the past fifteen years is chalked up to the scheming of a ragtag bunch of dissidents fostered and funded by Western capitalists and the U.S. State Department — and, of course, the perfidious support of our "otherwise progressive" Western intellectuals.

To put it bluntly, this is precisely the kind of hysterical response that infected millions of Communist Party members and their intellectual fellow travelers in the West when confronted with any opposition to or criticism of Soviet Stalinism in the 1930s.

Back then as well, any problems within the Soviet Union were blamed entirely on the threats and machinations of Western imperialism, fascism and various plotters — including Trotskyists, anarchists and social democrats. Then as well, it was "you're with us or against us." Back then, too, anyone who criticized or denounced the Soviet regime was branded either a willing or pliant accomplice in the pay of (read: "apologist" or "paid functionary") the CIA and Hitler.

On a more contemporary note, Petras here (like so many "otherwise progressive" intellectuals on the left before him) again trots out the same old slander and misrepresentation of the historic Solidarnosc movement in Poland. In the early 1980s, "Solidarity" conducted perhaps the most militant and massive workers' uprising in modern times. These "dissidents" didn't "close" the Gdansk shipyards, they occupied them! And they also struck and occupied factories, mines,

schools and offices throughout the entire country.

These "dissidents" in fact comprised virtually Poland's entire working class organized in regionally coordinated local workers' self-management bodies that had sprung up spontaneously during the strike wave in 1980. The 1981 draft program of Solidarnosc called for a national system of workers' self-management within the framework of a "socialized" (vs. merely "nationalized") economy. Meanwhile, Jaruzelski's bureaucrats and their Moscow mentors fought frantically to retain rigid, central command of a decaying and bureaucratically manipulated structure with an implacable hostility to any element of genuine workers' democracy. In fact, Jaruzelski declared martial law in December 1981 on the very eve of a planned national gathering of workers, self- management delegates — what would in effect have amounted to a full-fledged dual power situation.

It appears that Petras finds more kinship with the Stalinist "defenders" of "actually existing socialism" than with the Polish working class and its intellectual defenders.

Just imagine for a moment if Solidarnosc had succeeded in establishing workers' power in Poland through a self- managed economy and democratic political system. What might Poland and possibly all of Europe for that matter have looked like today? Would the world have seen in Poland the real possibilities of socialism as opposed to the dead hand of bureaucratism? And would not the liberating promise of socialism have retained some cachet among the new generation of anti-globalization and anticapitalist activists who instead have largely turned their backs on socialism?

Broadening the Context

THROUGHOUT HIS ARTICLE, Petras repeatedly sounds the alarm on the indirect and overt threats of a U.S. military intervention in Cuba, U.S. covert operations in funding and fomenting oppositional activity within the country, international U.S. imperialist aggression, Miami-based terrorism, and the like. In fact, Petras frames the dangers facing the Cuban revolution exclusively within this singular context.

Cuba and its problems are viewed entirely within the perspective of a hostile American regime bent on world domination. And it is this narrow alarmist framework that, in fact, defines his attitudes to all dissenters and critics of Cuban government policies, above all our "progressive" intellectuals.

Everything with Petras is U.S. vs. Cuba, state vs. state. There is nothing regarding Cuba's internal situation. Petras scarcely mentions the U.S. embargo and its effects. More significantly, he fails to address the question of how the base of Cuban society — workers, students, intellectuals — are expected to fulfill their essential function in defense of the revolution. Instead, they are relegated to a passive role, while the entire burden of the revolution seems to be shouldered by the Fidelista leadership.

Of course, the threat of U.S. intervention is real. It always has been. And admittedly there is a

greater urgency under the current U.S. administration. And yes, the U.S. engages in covert and overt destabilizing operations in Cuba as well as many other countries. And yes, the Bush administration is bent on world domination. However, is this exactly news? Especially after 9/11, Afghanistan and Iraq? And how does any of this justify the Cuban regime taking undemocratic actions against its critics and opponents, however serious the charges it may have against them?

It is ludicrous in any case for Petras to think that the intellectuals he denounces would not strongly oppose any imminent or actual U.S. invasion of Cuba, as they have on Iraq.

More importantly — and this is something Petras never addresses — the revolution is not just in danger from U.S. intervention, subversion and terrorism. There is also the dire internal crisis facing the country with its profound social consequences. The economic reforms introduced by the Cuban government over the past decade (many of them pro-market and even pro-capital, by the way) have spawned dangerous divisions among the Cuban population, virtual two-tiered health care, and serious unemployment. While some of these reforms may be necessary simply to keep the economy afloat, there is a very real danger that the revolution could eventually implode from within.

This is the actual context — external threat *and* internal crisis — in which the various problems facing the Cuban revolution must be considered, including that of organized opposition. In this context, internal dissatisfaction and criticism are inevitable. The challenge is, how best to harness the creative *and* critical energies of the Cuban people? How best to preserve, extend and in some cases restore the gains of the revolution?

Socialist Democracy is Key

TO BEGIN WITH, the larger strategic context must always be kept in mind: if it was impossible to achieve socialism in a single isolated country as it was in the Soviet Union in the 1920s and 30s (what was realized was, in fact, a grotesque caricature of socialism), it is that much more impossible in tiny, even more impoverished and isolated Cuba. But, for this very reason, the revolution requires the institution of genuine, full-fledged socialist democracy. The National Assembly, the People's Councils, the official unions, and other popular bodies are not in themselves sufficient. They do allow for some participation by much of the population. But the Cuban Communist Party maintains a monopoly of power — with dominant influence and control within these and other popular bodies.

In defense of the revolution itself, it is urgent that the Cuban government establish a system of real popular political and economic power (not mere participation), especially local and national structures of workers' self-management and control. At the same time, it is imperative that a plurality of workers' and other popularly based political parties be introduced, along with free elections within all bodies, the right to free assembly for all citizens, and freedom of the press. Let the Communist Party demonstrate the superiority of its vision, program and leadership within the full light

and debate of public opinion -- public opinion that is fully engaged and active in actually running the country.

Think of the beacon and example such a system of democratic socialism would be to all of Latin America and the rest of the world, including the United States itself, with its pathetic, transparently sham bourgeois democracy. On the other hand, if the Cuban leadership continues to balk at such a prospect (perhaps on the grounds it would "destabilize" the country), then it will be responding all-too-typically like the bureaucrats Rosa Luxemburg warned us about.

All socialists, as well as others, should be reminded that the Bolshevik Party's monopoly of power during the nascent years of the Soviet Union was to be a temporary measure. It was imposed during the then-raging Civil War, initiated by the armed opposition to Soviet power of the Russian White armies and the invasion by 15 imperialist armies including those of the U.S. and Canada. In fact, before the Civil War began, the Bolsheviks reserved seats in the Congress of Soviets for the absent Mensheviks and Social Revolutionaries, who had opposed the establishment of Soviet power and were at the time boycotting the Congress.

HINDSIGHT is ALWAYS BEST SIGHT. However, the continued Soviet Communist Party monopoly on power through the 1920s and beyond, it must be said, was a disastrous policy and egregious error. Had the Soviet workers and peasants been able to enjoy real Soviet (viz., Council) democracy during that time and had there been a plurality of parties, freedom of assembly and of the press, they might have been able to prevent the consolidation of the heinous Stalinist regime, the resultant deaths and misery of millions, and the corruption and emasculation of communist parties throughout the world which under the Kremlin's direction, it should again be pointed out, thwarted several potential socialist revolutions.

Our challenge is to learn from history. The Cuban revolution has survived now for over forty years. It is high time to invigorate Cuba's political system. Socialism is incompatible with continued exclusive centralist rule by the Cuban Communist Party. The defense of the Cuban revolution requires the ongoing, active engagement of the entire Cuban population enjoying complete socialist democracy. Otherwise, the revolution itself ultimately cannot survive.

From: "Zane Boyd"
Date: Fri, 13 Jun 2003

Fw: Reply to James Petras on Intellectuals and Cuba

The conventional view, shared by many on the left, is that socialism collapsed in eastern Europe because of its systemic weaknesses and the political elite's failure to build popular support. That may be partly true, but Soros's role was crucial. From 1979, he distributed $3m a year to dissidents including Poland's Solidarity movement, Charter 77 in Czechoslovakia and Andrei Sakharov in the Soviet Union. In 1984, he founded his first Open Society Institute in Hungary and pumped millions of dollars into opposition movements and independent media.

Ostensibly aimed at building up a "civil society", these initiatives were designed to weaken the existing political structures and pave the way for eastern Europe's eventual colonisation by global capital. Soros now claims, with characteristic immodesty, that he was responsible for the "Americanisation" of eastern Europe.